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AUTHOR First, Joan
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ABSTRACT

This public relations handbook for staff members of early childhood organizations identifies elements of the communications process and provides tips on conducting effective publicity activities. News (hard breaking news and news with a human interest slant) is distinguished from trivia and examples are given of each. Guidelines for arranging media cooperation, conducting a press conference and producing spot public service announcements for radio and television are offered. A sample news release, photo cutline, and press conference materials are included. (RH)

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A PUBLIC RELATIONS HANDBOOK

for

EARLY CHILDHOOD ORGANIZATIONS

by

Joan First

PS010044

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Ann Sartin

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of public relations activity by a SACUS affiliate is to help the organization achieve, within its own community, a reputation which accurately reflects vigorous, ethical and knowledgeable approaches to conducting business. Such reputations are not quickly achieved, nor achieved at all without both careful planning and hard work. The results however, are well worth the effort.

Among them are likely to be:

--Growing membership;

--Increased willingness on the part of members to contribute generously of time and energy. (Who doesn't want to be associated with a winner?"

-- Solidified credibility as a source for information sought by decision-makers charged with allocating community dollars and other resources.

Don't view a sudden hectic public relations campaign as a panacea for the problems of a weak organization. (In the end, poor products aren't sold by their wrappings!) Do view planned public relations activity as a necessary part of your organization's orderly growth and maturation.

If you have accepted responsibility for implementing this part of an affiliate's program, you have another compelling reason to "go pro." By planning ahead and understanding the principles of the communication process, you will gain better control over your own life. It is no fun to be on the receiving end of a stream of requests for "quickie" news releases. It is even less fun to produce them under pressure, then search in vain in the morning paper!

This handbook will identify elements of the communications process and suggest ways to successfully combine them. You will find step-by-step guides for coping with such common problems as producing inexpensive public service announcements, procuring media public service time and space, writing professional news releases and running a smooth press conference, when the occasion merits.

GOOD LUCK!

I. COMMUNICATIONS PROCESS ANALYZED

The basic concept underlying an effective public relations program by your state or local SACUS affiliate is one with which most early childhood educators are already familiar: The problem and the match.

In this case, as in the classroom, learning and persuasion occur most effectively when a specific message, carefully constructed to build upon existing knowledge, is communicated. Any public awareness effort is most effective when all the components of the communications process interact properly. This is, the "right" message originates from the "right" source via the "right" media vehicle to the "right" audience. It is simpler than it sounds. Imagine for a moment a group of Little Leaguers listening with rapt attention to Tom Seaver of the Cincinnati Reds explain how to pitch a curve ball. All the elements click. The audience shares common knowledge and is hungry for more (the Message). The vehicle is engrossing, face-to-face communication. The source is a trusted authority.

Remembering that specificity is the key, let's look separately at each component of the communications process.

The Audience

The existence of an amorphous "general public" reachable by the mass media is largely a myth. There is, instead, an almost endless array of smaller audiences. (Makers of children's toys pay homage to that fact fact when they buy TV time between Saturday morning cartoons.) Among them are such diverse groupes as school children, college students,

businessmen, parents, professionals and myriad others bound together by social, religious or economic ties. Each of these groups has unique informational needs--and unique potential for bettering the lives of young children.

Theoretically, each merits separate consideration as you attempt to influence them to respond favorably to your organization and its concerns. Yet, to do so is impractical. You can, however, carefully compile a list of sub-audiences, then combine those groups with like interests and needs, finally assigning highest priority to those who can contribute most to achievement of your organization's goals. At the top of the list are likely to be community decision-makers (because of their impact upon children's programs); parents (because their behavior so strongly affects the quality of life children experience), etc. Look for ways to combine groups meaningfully. For example, parents and adolescents likely to become parents can both benefit from receiving child development information.

Each communication attempt should try to elicit a specific kind of behavior from the target audience. For example, an objective of an "image-building" public service radio message is to increase membership. The objective of a parent education public service announcement, on the other hand, may be better breakfasts for children.

Without thoughtful identification of the many potential "audiences" which comprise your community, successful communication is unlikely to occur. Put succinctly, its better to shoot with a rifle than a shotgun.

The Message

The early childhood "story" has dozens of aspects. The task of educating parents, professionals and public decision-makers is not best achieved by telling the whole story, over and over again. Look for angles. Be aware of which audience segment's support is most critical to the attainment of a specific objective. If the objective is greater affiliate membership and increased professionalization among teachers, the message should include specific information about membership benefits: A fall conference? A subscription to DIMENSIONS? Regular meetings to share ideas?

On the other hand, if the objective is action by a state legislative committee to approve full-funding for kindergarten programs, the message will be quite different—but equally specific. How many children now attend kindergarten? How do they benefit? How many more need these services? How much will providing them cost?

The Source

There are many possible sources for every message. You will want to choose one which enjoys the highest credibility with the audience to whom the message is directed.

If, for example, you wish to encourage legislative support for programs for young children, careful selection of message source may be critical.

The objective here is to both inform and persuade. Put yourself in the place of key committee members. Before you decide to write a news release quoting your affiliate president on the issue, try to determine who each member of the committee considers a "significant

other". Can a bit of sleuthing turn up an ardent political supporter, a revered former teacher, or a respected colleague of the target individual? If you can locate a sympathetic "significant other" inform him, then enlist his active help in persuading the target individual. Another option could be to select one or more well-informed members of your group to engage in face-to-face dialogue with the target person or persons. Finally, if you decide to issue a news release, be sure it is well-documented and quotes a source considered trustworthy by the target audience.

The principle is simple. Just ask yourself two questions: Who am I trying to persuade? Who does he/she listen to?

Communications Vehicle

While the mass media influence many aspects of our lives, your search of the most effective vehicle for your message should not be limited to them.

Face-to-face communication remains more effective than either printed or electronic media. Mainly because it provides an opportunity for the speaker to monitor feedback from target audience. If the listener is unconvinced...or the message is muddled...an alert speaker will sense it and respond by immediately setting the situation right.

For this reason, many groups involved in community debate over controversial issues organize speakers bureaus and aggressively pursue opportunities to tell their story face to face.

If you or other members of your group shy away from the limelight of public speaking, an inexpensive slide/tape show can provide an important support. A ten-minute presentation covering the basic points

removes the burden of speech preparation and makes it possible for the speaker to tailor additional information to the audience's needs during an informal question and answer session.

Another vehicle for putting information in the hands of carefully selected audience groups is direct mail. Personal letters (not form letters) are particularly effective if the message comes from a source already well known to the reader.

Telephone campaigns, carried out tactfully, are also useful. Take some hints from politicians experienced in organizing such efforts: 1) Whenever possible, be sure the caller knows the call receiver personally; 2) Keep the message low key and super-courteous; and 3) Callers should ask whether the call comes at a convenient time and acquiesce pleasantly at the first sign of a negative response.

Many organizations have their own internal newsletters with a well-developed readership. You will benefit from both economy and implied endorsement if you succeed in convincing them to include information about your group's objectives and undertakings.

II. WHAT IS NEWS?

News directors allocate media time/space to two kinds of "news"--hard breaking news and material with a human interest slant.

As example of a hard news break concerning young children was creation by one Southern Governor of a Task Force to investigate the handling of child abuse cases. The announcement came on the heels of several questionably handled, much-publicized abuse cases. The story was well played by the media, even though it competed with a tragic ferry boat sinking (regionally) and pre-election news (nationally) for media attention.

On the same day, equal play might well have been given to a local kindergarten raising of $18.50 toward the purchase of a friend for a favorite and lonely snake at a local zoo. News editors seek such touches of humor, warmth and charm to bring needed balance to each days news.

The success of any public awareness campaign will depend largely upon its manager developing a keen "nose" for both types of news...the ability to recognize news of either variety when it happens (or are caused to happen) and to call that happening to the immediate attention of news media.

News directors quickly gain the respect of those news sources who regularly provide material with inherent news value and just as quickly come to ignore the offerings of sources which provide a steady stream of trivia.

Examples of subjects which have inherent "hard" news value include: 1) Names of newly elected officers; 2) Announcements of forthcoming conferences, and other special events; 3) A visit from the SACUS President (provided substantive quotes are worked in showing timely local angles, such as comparisons between your state level of support of public kindergartens and others in the region.); and 4) The results of community studies or surveys undertaken by your organization.

Examples of human interest stories occur frequently because young children are a naturally lively subject. These might include feature stories about a senior citizen who has become a beloved classroom volunteer, or a field trip taking a group of four-year olds on a city bus "to the end of the line". Be sure to invite newspapers to send a photographer to cover appealing activities involving children--but don't be offended if the invitation is sometimes refused.

Yearly conferences offer an especially rich opportunity for media coverage. Press releases should begin several weeks before the conference, outlining program highlights, with increasing specificity. General session speakers should be asked to send advance copies of their speeches to serve as the basis for releases before and during the conference. You may choose to send media representatives a copy of the program with a letter pointing to those events which have the greatest news value. A committment from a newspaper or from electronic media to have their staff cover an event is <u>always</u> preferable to a news release. Greater priority is given to staff written articles and photos, since there is already a time investment on the part of the media.

Getting to know the individuals who comprise local media, and enlisting their help, is your responsibility. You will want to:

1. Meet personally with each general manager, news director and newspaper editor, introducing your organization and its program;

2. Explain that yours is a voluntary organization and that, as such it has an extremely limited budget. Make clear your need for public service time--spot announcements, special programs and interviews on community talk shows. *(Note: by law the media is required to provide a certain ratio of free public service time.)*

3. Keep media personnel abreast of new developments, as they occur. Send beat reporters informational materials, even when no news story is immediately merited.

4. Be honest, even when it is uncomfortable. Reporters will usually cooperate with reasonable requests, provided they feel they have a straightforward relationship with you. Most of all, they dislike feeling manipulated.

5. Be sure to express your thanks by phone or letter when good coverage or special consideration is provided.

6. Take a walk around the block to cool down before making an irate phone call in response to media goofs. Long range good will is usually worth more then momentary accuracy.

7. If you are doing all of the above, but still feel you are receiving poor coverage, make an appointment to discuss the situation. Express your concern. Ask whether you are doing something wrong. Try to be uncritical. Don't let a communication failure begin.

Chances of having news releases and photos used will increase significantly if the following are remembered:

1. Most important facts should appear in the first paragraph: Who, what, why, when, where and how.

2. Other material should follow in order of importance. Stories are frequently edited with scissors to fit existing newspaper column space. If a critical fact is in the last paragraph it can't be lopped off-- and a rewrite is necessary. If time is short, this can cause your release to end in the wastebasket.

3. Include lots of names, properly spelled and with correct addresses, when appropriate. Names make news.

4. News releases should always be typed and double spaced.

5. Always indicate a release date at the top. If the date doesn't matter, mark it "For Immediate Release."

6. A story about new officers from different communities should be sent to newspapers in their hometowns. (A directory of all newspapers in your state and their deadlines is available from your state press association.)

7. Find out the deadlines for news casts at radio and television stations. Avoid scheduling a press conference or delivering releases close to deadlines when media personnel are most harried.

8. If you submit photographs to newspapers, be sure they are of professional quality and interesting composition. Avoid posed group shots. Never submit snapshots.

9. Photos should be 5 x 7" or larger and of glossy, black and white with good contrast.

10. Each photo should carry the names of persons pictures written in wax pencil on the back, noted from right to left.

11. Cutlines should describe in several sentences the purpose of the photo and the people shown and their titles. (See example).

12. Photos should be mailed flat, between cardboard stiffners and marked "do not fold".

13. Always ask for a staff photographer to cover an event. If it isn't possible say, "Thanks anyway" and make your own arrangements. Staff photos are more likely to be used than those submitted from other sources.

14. Don't forget the editorial page as an important resource. On political issues especially, you will want to keep editorial writers informed. Here of all places, use velvet gloves. Editorial writers jealously guard their independence and tend to resent pressure. It may backfire.

SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE

FOR RELEASE: Sunday, October 14, 1977

Lead paragraph should contain all pertinent facts: Who, What, Why, When, Where.

Dr. Benjamin Spock, world-renowned child care authority, will be the featured speaker at a special "Salute to Parents" event to be held in Ballroom "C" of the Little Rock Convention Center on Wednesday, October 17 at 8 p.m.

Free and open to the public, "Salute to Parents" is part of the annual conference of the Arkansas Association on Children Under Six (AACUS) to be held October 14 through 16.

Supplemental facts.

Program chairperson Maude Ann McBride said Spock's address will be followed by a question and answer period and informal reception.

Other conference highlights will include presentation of the AACUS "Teacher of the Year Award" and installation of the 1977-78 officers in ceremonies Tuesday evening.

Local Names

Incoming AACUS officers include the following: Jack Halliburton, 2391 Kokomo Drive, Little Rock; Vice-president, Sandra Smith, 1843 Wedgewood Drive, Jonesboro; Secretary, Aubrey

Hightower, 23 Old Towne Drive, Fort Smith; and Treasurer, Gary Macklin, 2136 Raven's Way, Camden.

Conference registration will open at 8 a.m. Monday in the Civic Center Foyer.

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For additional information call:

Sandra Locke
1938 Wellers Road
Little Rock, AR 72207
501-371-6678

SAMPLE PHOTO CUTLINE

--SPOCK ARRIVES: Jack Halliburton, 1977-78 president of the Arkansas Association on Children Under Six (AACUS) greets well known child care authority Dr. Benjamin Spock at Adams Field, Little Rock. Dr. Spock is in town to address a public meeting of parents of young children at 8 p.m. Wednesday, October 21 in Ballroom "C" of the Little Rock, Convention Center.

[The cutline above contains all the essential facts about the Spock address and could stand alone, if used without the news release which preceeds it.]

III. THE PRESS CONFERENCE--WHEN? HOW?

Press conferences as a means of attracting media attention should be used very sparingly. A well-run press conference can facilitate media exposure to an especially exciting person or event. Press conferences are a little like the "Little Girl with a Curl" of nursery rhyme fame: When they are good they are marvelous; when they are bad, they are horrid. And the most horrid are those called as an attempt to manipulate the media into providing attention beyond that which a happening deserves.

Save press conferences for the news "biggies"--a new building, a visit from a nationally know authority, or the release of other complex information which may have great impact upon the community.

Avoid using the press conference to make simple, short announcements. Few things are more disconcerting than a roomful of reporters who still look expectant after the announcement has been made.

It is usual to have one person introduce the main speaker at a press conference. (Introductions should be brisk but informal.) The same person should stand by ready to interrupt the moment questioning slows with "Thank you, and good day". The speaker should never be left to stand in embarrassment awaiting a final question which never comes.

Attendance at a press conference can frequently be bolstered by the site chosen for it. For this reason, governors are often asked for the use of their press room, even when the event only indirectly involves them. Think of other likely sites--the School Board Room? The office of a supportive Congressman?

Two other variables are likely to play an important part in attendance. They are: 1) the time of day the conference is held and 2) how the press is invited. Avoid harried before-deadline times of day. Letters should be sent out at least a week in advance with follow-up phone calls to news directors early in the morning of the day of the conference.

Because press conferences are, by nature, reserved for big and complex events, you will want to have a variety of handout material available. These should include: 1) a news release (written in the pyramidal style so electronic media can skin off the first paragraph or two for fast use); 2) a fact sheet explaining any background information now included in the news release which will be useful to reporters wishing to rewrite; and 3) any brochures, maps, etc. which may be useful. Be sure to provide correct spelling of unfamiliar names and places in the fact sheet.

Samples of a letter of invitation and materials appropriate for use as press conference handouts follow:

SAMPLE LETTER

Date

Name
Title
Station
Address
City, State & Zip

Dear Mr. Johnson: (Unless you are on a first name basis)

A press conference has called by Jack Halliburton, president of the Arkansas Association on Children Under Six (AACUS) to announce plans for construction of a half-million dollar Early Childhood Center to be constructed in Central Little Rock.

The press conference will be held at _____on_____, 1977 in the _____. We would very much appreciate your attendance.

Among others attending the press conference will be Congressman Harry Rucker, Mayor Trenton Truckly, and Jeanne Emerson, president of the Southern Association on Children Under Six (of which AACUS is an affiliate).

I will be in touch with you later this week to provide additional information concerning the planned Early Childhood Center.

Should you have questions, please feel free to call.

Sincerely,

Sandra Locke
1939 Wellers Road
Little Rock, AR 72207
501-371-6678

SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE

TO: Arkansas Dailies and Weeklies

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jack Halliburton, President of the Arkansas Association on Children Under Six, today revealed detailed plans for a large, half-million dollar Early Childhood Center to be located in central Little Rock.

Halliburton said groundbreaking for the new center, to occur on October 21, will culminate more than five years of fund raising and planning by AACUS, a state-wide association of persons who work with young children in day care and educational settings.

The center will be located at 1221 Cumberland Drive on a site bounded on the north by Delaware Drive. The proposed building was designed by the Chicago architectural firm of Benton, Crosby and Southerland. It will contain space for AACUS administrative offices, conference rooms, a materials resource center and a multi-purpose large meeting area which can be divided into two separate classrooms.

Halliburton said funds for the building's construction have come froma a variety of sources, including donations from the public, various AACUS fund raising activities and a matching grant of $250,000 from the Everly Foundation.

Little Rock Mayor Trenton Truckly said the building would contribute significantly to the restoration of the site area, which is included in the Metropolitan Renewal Area.

Completion of the structure is scheduled for July, 1978.

For further information contact:

Sandra Locke
1939 Wellers Road
Little Rock, AR 72207
501-371-6678

FACT SHEET

1. Site is located at 1221 Cumberland Drive, bounded on North by Delaware Drive and East by Cumberland Drive. Immediately adjacent to the new central Fire Station.
2. Funds from public donations, matched by Eberly Foundation grant. Projected cost: $500,000 for building and site.
3. Construction bidding will open November 15.
4. Building will include 12,000 square feet of floor space, and will be three stories high. Construction will be of red brick, glass and copper.
5. Completion is scheduled for July, 1978.
6. The Arkansas Association on Children Under Six is a state-wide child advocacy organization and an affiliate of the Southern Association on Children Under Six. AACUS has 900 members.

For further information contact:

Sandra Locke
1939 Wellers Road
Little Rock, AR 72207
501-371-6678

IV.

Radio

Most radio stations are pleased to provide public service time. There is nothing complicated about writing a 30-second spot (which most stations prefer over 60-seconds). Try for something catchy--with a specific message.

Example: *Love is not enough. Young children who spend the day away from home need loving caregivers, good food and a chance to learn as they grow. For suggestions about how you can evaluate the day care program your child attends, call the Texas Association for the Education of Young Children.....888-8888.*

When you have written several and timed them, solicit help from a local radio station to get them narrated and recorded. Distribute dubs of the master tape to other stations.

Television

Television public service announcements can be as simple as a half-dozen charming slides of children and a 30-second narration taken to your local station for assembly--or as complex as live footage shot by an ad agency at a cost of several thousand dollars.

Your organization will probably want to go the inexpensive route, remembering that stations use the same spot for a couple of weeks then, no matter how expensive or sophisticated it is, lay it aside for fresh material.

Ask one station in your community to video-tape slides and narration so they are synchronized properly. You will probably want to ask other stations to provide a blank videotape on which their dub will be made.

While this system may involve a bit of running around on your part, it effectively eliminates cost.

Most stations will send you a bill marked "paid in full" each month, indicating how frequently and when your spot was aired, and what the cost would have been had the time not been provided as a public service.

Avoid at all costs public service announcements which consist of an amateur talking into a television camera. They are almost always amateurish and uninteresting.

If you want to have live footage shot, try talking directly to a film production company. If you already have script ideas, you may be able to save the cost of advertising agency overhead.

Tape Slide Presentations

Agency produced, a 15-minute slide tape presentation can cost upwards of $1,500. You can cut cost to the bone if you write your own script and have a good amateur photographer take color slides (or ask teachers and parents of young children to look at their slide collections.) Again, appealing close-ups of young children can be used to illustrate almost anything you want to say about your organization.

Once you have the slides and narration in hand, ask one of your members who is affiliated with a school system or university which has an audio-visual department for help in getting the narration on

tape and synchronized with the slides. (Audio tapes with visual synchronization require special equipment to use. You may wish to simply have the script duplicated and have the shower push the slide advance button on the projector at indicated places in the narration.)

If you cannot find an audio visual department willing to help with narration, you may want to inquire about help from a local radio station. Another alternative is to check the telephone directory Yellow pages under "audio production" for firms which specialize in making professional recordings. (The same firms usually will inexpensively make dubs of slide/tape show narrations, radio spots, etc.)

Conclusion

If you have read this far, you haven't become a "pro"--but you have come a long way toward being a well-informed amateur. Wade right in...have fun...and if you have questions which aren't answered there, feel free to contact SACUS Headquarters, Box 5403, Brady Station, Little Rock, AR 72215 (telephone: 501-227-6404).